

Oil-response Activities by the Gulf of Mexico Sea Grant College Programs

Research

REGIONAL RESEARCH PLANNING

Sea Grant facilitated development of the Gulf of Mexico Research Plan (GMRP) to identify priority research needs. The Plan was completed September 2009 with input from over 1,500 people and 260 universities, government agencies, businesses, NGOs and other organizations. At least 14 groups have already agreed to incorporate the GMRP in their strategic planning and/or requests for proposals, which have been used to fund millions of dollars of research. In response to the oil spill, the plan is being revised to reflect immediate and mid- to long-term economic, environmental and social research needs.

GULF OF MEXICO OIL-RELATED RESEARCH CLEARINGHOUSE

To further enhance the coordination of oil-spill research in the Gulf, Sea Grant, in collaboration with NOAA's National Coastal Data Development Center, is developing and hosting a web-based clearinghouse that will provide a one-stop location for investigators and funding agencies. The clearinghouse will include basic information on oil spill-related research projects and monitoring activities. The web-based clearinghouse will allow users to enter information about current oil spill research or monitoring activities or perform searches and queries to access information that others had entered.

The Sea Grant sponsored database of research and monitoring activities in response to the Gulf oil spill (<http://gulfseagrant.tamu.edu/oilspill/database.htm>) now includes 84 project descriptions. We have been in discussions with BP and they have agreed to add the research they sponsor which is expected to be another 100-150 projects.

OIL SPILL RELATED RESEARCH

The Gulf Sea Grant Programs have funded, or are about to fund, rapid response research projects assessing the impacts on commercial fisheries and shellfish, oyster reefs, salt marshes, seagrass beds, microbes and algae.

Extension, Outreach and Education

HOST AND ORGANIZE PUBLIC FORUMS

The Sea Grant college programs are conducting public forums with their partners to help provide answers to questions the public and constituent groups have about the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. These forums are being held in every Gulf state, and experts from federal and state agencies, BP, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector have been invited to participate. The forums provide an opportunity for Gulf Coast residents and businesses to learn more about oil spill related topics.

ORGANIZE SEAFOOD WORKING GROUP

Sea Grant has helped organize a seafood working group to provide guidance and coordination regarding seafood safety, fisheries closures and approaches to re-opening closed fisheries and will provide engagement with local communities and fishing interests. The group is called the Fisheries Assessment and Seafood Team (FAST). Florida Sea Grant Seafood Specialist coordinated seafood sensory training workshops put on by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and NOAA Fisheries.

ENGAGE LEGAL AND EXTENSION SPECIALISTS WITH FISHING COMMUNITIES

Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi-Alabama extension and legal specialists have been working with fishing communities to provide information on the spill and facilitate interaction with BP to help with the damage claim process. Legal programs have been providing legal explanations (not advice) of complex documents. Sea Grant's two Vietnamese-speaking extension agents have facilitated Vietnamese-American fishing communities' interactions with the government and BP by providing translation and being a

trusted source of information.

SHARE INFORMATION THROUGH NATIONAL EXPERTS AND REGIONAL WEBSITE

The Sea Grant programs brought Alaskans with Exxon Valdez experience to the coast to share lessons learned with fishermen and others. They also developed a website with data and up-to-date information about the oil spill (gulfseagrant.org).

CONDUCT HAZMAT TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR CLEANUP ACTIVITIES

Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium (MASGC) coordinated Module 3 Hazmat instructor training for 33 professionals who will be on standby to work with BP's contract training company, PEC Premier. MASGC and the Alabama Cooperative Extension Systems are also working with BP to develop a waterfront homeowner training module that can be applied Gulf-wide. Florida Sea Grant and Florida Cooperative Extension also coordinated several Module 2 and 3 Hazmat trainings, as well as several Vessels of Opportunity meetings attended by more than 1,200 individuals.

COORDINATE WITH OTHERS

Sea Grant programs continue to coordinate with National Estuarine Research Reserves, Coastal Zone Management programs, and the NOAA Gulf of Mexico Regional Team and others on oil-related needs and issues. Louisiana Sea Grant Extension Agent Julie Falgout is embedded at the Unified Command Center in Houma, La. The five Gulf state's U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Services have weekly communication calls and have developed four task forces: Damage Assessment, Family Stress and Financial Management, Food Safety and Consumer Confidence, and Oil Spill Communications. Many extension agents are members of their Emergency Operations Centers and/or members of their respective oil spill contingency planning teams. Florida agents coordinated several pre-oil beach clean-ups that will help oil clean-up if it arrives on shore.

PEER LISTENING SESSIONS

For people dealing with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, having friends to talk to about day-to-day stresses can lead them toward healing and coping. About 90 Gulf Coast residents attended two training sessions July 14 and 15 to become volunteer peer listeners in a program coordinated by the Gulf of Mexico Sea Grant Programs, U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension, Auburn University Marine Center, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration Team, NOAA Gulf Coast Services Center and Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Peer listeners learned how to make people feel at ease and talk about what they are feeling. They also learned characteristics of a good listener. Other topics included communications skills, managing anger, identifying depression and assessing suicide risk. They were encouraged to use the skills to bloom where they are planted and work with friends, family, co-workers and neighbors. "Peer listening is effective because many people who need help may be reluctant to seek out mental health professionals after a technological disaster," said LaDon Swann, director of the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium. "This training gives people skills to help them create a social safety net in their communities." Sociologist Steven Picou of the University of South Alabama, who implemented the peer listener training in Alaska after the Exxon Valdez oil spill and has performed extensive A training session also was held at the Bayou La Batre Community Center in Bayou La Batre, Ala. A third training session is planned for July 23 in Gulf Shores, Ala. Other trainings are scheduled for July 28 and July 29 in Baton Rouge, and other sessions will be